This talk examines one of the most stunning cases of Jewish integration in the “golden age” following emancipation: Rachel Félix, who became France’s most celebrated actress in the 1830s and ‘40s with her electrifying performances as the heroines of Racine and Corneille at the Comédie Française. The daughter of poor, Yiddish-speaking peddlers, Rachel single-handedly revived the neo-classical theatrical tradition while at the same time maintaining—some would say flaunting—her Jewish identity. Reading the critical response to Rachel from the time, Samuels explores how she offered a model for the way French universalism, embodied in the neo-classical tradition, could be enabled rather than hindered by Jewishness.

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